

Pride and Prejudice in Film Adaptations

Research Thesis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| 1 Introduction..... | 1 |
| 2 Historical Context..... | 2 |
| 3 Elizabeth Bennet..... | 8 |
| 4 Jane Bennet..... | 17 |
| 5 Mary Bennet..... | 26 |
| 6 Georgiana Darcy | 32 |
| 7 Lady Catherine de Bourgh..... | 34 |
| 8 Conclusions..... | 40 |
| WORKS CITED..... | 41 |

Chapter 1: Introduction

Pride and Prejudice, the beloved and much-analyzed British novel written by Jane Austen and published in 1813, has seen a plethora of film, theater, and television adaptations across the 200 years it has been in print. The novel has been both criticized and loved for the same reason: its female characters. The women of *Pride and Prejudice* are often analyzed as characters whose fates comment on the situation of upper and middle class women during the early nineteenth century, particularly in terms of gender, class, and wealth. The plot concerns five daughters who will not inherit their father's estate or income and therefore must marry well to maintain themselves after his death. Elizabeth Bennet, in the novel, is seen as a character who resists the restrictive gender roles of her era by refusing to marry for material gain even when that seems to be her only option. During this time, women were expected to marry who their parents chose and were not given substantive educations or encouraged to display their intellect. Under the tradition of primogeniture that maintained great estates intact across generations by leaving them to an eldest male descendant, few women inherited directly from their fathers. In most cases, any property women owned would become their husband's upon marriage. The lives of Elizabeth, Jane, Mary, Georgiana, and Lady Catherine are all influenced by these legal and cultural norms. The films modify their characters and therefore the political statements of their actions. In particular, there are three major adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* that revise in ways large and small the female characters: a 1940 film directed by Robert Z. Leonard, BBC's 1995 television series directed by Simon Langton, and a 2005 film directed by Joe Wright. These revisions are frequently influenced by the historical moment in which the films were produced, and these revisions point to important contemporary attitudes towards gender that help us understand assumptions about women's place in society.

Chapter 2: Historical Context

During the 1790s, when Jane Austen was writing the first draft of *Pride and Prejudice*, ideologies concerning rank and gender were rapidly evolving. Some scholars believe that novels documented and even contributed to these changing ideologies in society. With the overthrow of the monarchy during The French Revolution (1789-1799), the new ideals of government that inspired the American Revolution, and a commercializing economy, ideologies of rank were under siege as well. What we now call the middle class was in formation. *Pride and Prejudice* documents these changes with characters such as the Bingleys, who made their wealth from trade and are now able to attain property and all the airs and status of being landed gentry like the Darcy family. Historians label such families as “pseudo-gentry,” described as “professional families who lived in the country-side and were allied by kinship, social ties and social aspirations to the gentry, but unlike the gentry depended on an earned income rather than an income derived from the land. Moreover, they depended on their income to pay for the goods that gave them their genteel appearance” (Brosh 150). The novel follows families of varying degrees of rank within the gentry, at the center of which is the Bennet family. Although descended from a gentleman with a landed estate, the daughters are in a precarious position because the estate itself will descend to a distant cousin upon their father’s death. With only the small income from a \$2000 inheritance to anticipate for support, the daughters’ prospects depend upon their ability to marry a man of at least moderate wealth. It is assumed that the eldest sister, Jane, is the most likely to marry a wealthy husband because she is very beautiful, and the girls’ mother, Mrs. Bennet, loudly anticipates that she will secure the family’s future by enticing Mr. Bingley into marriage. In the end, Elizabeth marries the wealthier of the two men, Mr. Darcy, despite the disapproval of his aunt, Lady Catherine, who considers the Bennet family beneath

them. In a famous scene, Elizabeth defends herself against Lady Catherine by saying that she is equal to Mr. Darcy because she is a gentleman's daughter as he is a gentleman. The aunt contests this because Elizabeth's other family members are in trade. With the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen is commenting on the limitations her society placed on women and on changing ideas about class.

Within the aristocracy and gentry, men and women traditionally had distinct roles, which were also changing due to economic and cultural factors. Estates were passed down to the first male heir, like Mr. Darcy, and these gentlemen were expected to maintain the property and pass it down to the next son. In the patriarchal tradition, they were also considered responsible for the entire household, including servants, morally and financially. With both wealth and leisure (due to the rents they collected from their estate), these men were expected to support and model appropriate behavior for their dependents and protect their wives, daughters, and female servants. Conversely, women's role was to marry well and become accomplished in attractive talents such as singing, playing piano, or painting. Besides these skills, they were educated very little, and were to remain chaste before marriage and monogamous after. The novel abounds with examples of young men and women who fail to live up to these standards of feminine and masculine conduct: Mr. Wickham, who gambles himself into debt and attempts to elope with Mr. Darcy's sister, and Lydia Bennet, who actually does elope with Mr. Wickham, and is only saved from ruin because of Mr. Darcy's intervention.

At the heart of this traditional system is marriage, which secured the future of estates. Men were expected to marry women of similar rank to themselves, while women traditionally were expected to marry as their families directed (usually to someone of similar rank). But these ideals were also changing with the rise of the middle class and individualism. "Companionate

marriage” (Stone 136) was becoming the norm, and love became the ideal inspiration for marriage, not money. Jane and Elizabeth Bennet both believe in companionate marriage, but other characters pursue matches for money or status. Charlotte Lucas, who marries Mr. Collins, is in a similar situation to Elizabeth, without beauty or dowry, and consequently arranges to marry Mr. Collins, the unappealing heir to the Bennet estate. Men like Mr. Wickham, without wealth although associated with the gentry, attempted to seduce not only Miss Darcy and Lydia, and sought an heiress named Miss King for her wealth. Then there is Lady Catherine, who hopes to marry her daughter, Anne, to Mr. Darcy because doing so would keep the estate and fortune within the family. Jane Austen’s novel both tracks these social changes and comments on them through the fates of her characters, who either rely on tradition or embrace change. And it is usually the latter who are rewarded.

Pride and Prejudice is often enjoyed for its romance plot but can be considered a feminist text because the way in which it shows the limits placed on women’s intelligence and autonomy. The novel is easily misread as a simple romance—and is cast that way in film at times—because of the narrator’s ironic, light tone and the happy ending. Christina Neckles comments on the situation Austen faced, writing in a time where it was acceptable for women to write about love, but not to critique society. She says that Austen “had to necessarily be indirect and subtle” (30) with the critique, disguising it with a romance plot. The novel questions common nineteenth-century beliefs about marriage and women’s place in everyday life by portraying a main character who does not treat marriage as the central goal of her life, though the plot does revolve around issues of marriage and property. The novel critiques women who marry for money or higher social standing as opposed to love and the men who do the same, while also demonstrating how legal and social conventions drive them to treat marriage as an affair of

property and status. Austen also raises questions about women's rank in society. For example, the entire premise of the novel centers around the fact that women cannot inherit property and are at the whim of their fathers, husbands, brothers, and the wealthy bachelors around them. In the eyes of the law at the time, "women are chattels, do not have legal existence separate from their husbands, and do not have the capacity to own property" (Raitt 133). Class rank was a factor that influenced courtship during Austen's lifetime and is reflected in the hardships many of her characters face, including Charlotte and Elizabeth. Traditionally, marriage was considered a matter of property and status in the upper classes, and only in the 19th century were these ideas changing.

The film adaptations treat these potentially radical ideas with varying degrees of importance, each influenced heavily by the time in which it was released. Factors such as wartime and feminist movements have different levels of influence over the adaptations from the 1940 to 1995 to 2005 films. Loira Brosh argues that the "adaptations necessarily filter novels through the cultural, social and political lens of a particular moment in history, a moment which also determines how a film adapts women characters" (147). The historical moment has been particularly significant in transforming the underlying feminist ideology into something quite different, shifting attention away from Austen's concerns in the novel. It is quite telling that the characters who typically go against convention are also the ones who are most frequently revised. For example, in the novel Elizabeth Bennet is not traditionally beautiful and is not as "accomplished" as many of the other female characters, so it is significant when she is given new traits and when her dialogue is rewritten to represent something at odds with her character in the novel. Each of these revisions significantly changes viewers' interpretations of the characters, the story itself, and the historical moment.

The 1940 adaptation (starring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier) clearly takes the most liberties by inventing, editing, and deleting critical scenes from the novel. For this adaptation in particular, the historical moment was key to understanding all these revisions because the film acted as propaganda. During this time, the British were in the midst of a world war and needed Americans to join the fight in Europe. *Pride and Prejudice* was chosen because it is a British romance that subtly deals with issues of marriage, consumerism, and women during wartime, typical themes that would have been relatable for the audience they were trying to reach: women. But the filmmakers had to rewrite the script so that it deemphasized the issues of class and inherited rank in order to appease a capitalist American audience and create familiarity between the opposing cultures, leading them to want to help their once “mother nation” who they had grown apart from since. The changes to the script, while they were initially meant to be persuasive in the war effort, also point to the period’s sexist ideologies by today’s standards that depict women as primarily driven by marriage, physical beauty, and materialism.

The 1995 BBC television series (starring Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth) is similarly impacted by its historical moment. In the fifty-five years since the 1940 adaptation, feminist movements had changed many aspects of life for American women including job availability and equality as well as changing ideologies about a female’s place inside and outside the home. These new philosophies surface in this adaptation. Given that this series is nearly six hours long, it can, of course, go into much more depth than the other adaptations, and the directors also chose to try and stay as close to the novel as possible. However, the series also emphasizes a sexual chemistry between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, something that would not have been acceptable during the 1940s. The most famous example is when Mr. Darcy dives into the water when he thinks he is alone at Pemberley. Elizabeth then runs into him drenched and half-clothed

while visiting his estate. The greater emphasis on sexual desire necessitates concern about Elizabeth's mindfulness about her own physical beauty and appearance, something foreign to Elizabeth's characterization in the novel. And while her dialog might stay the same, subtle deviations—as simple as a look in a mirror—change Elizabeth's characterization completely.

Ten years after the television series, the 2005 film (starring Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfadyen) is again a different genre that focuses on artistic quality rather than faithfulness to the original text. With this change in objective, the film sometimes sacrifices the message Austen tried to express for artistic value. Scenery in the film changes drastically from what is described in the novel, and these changes matter—such as the scene in which Elizabeth falls in love with Mr. Darcy while touring his home. As is true with all the adaptations but particularly this one, visual layers add depth to the script that might not have as much weight in the novel. So when importance is placed on things like setting, costuming, and facial expressions, a new dynamic is added that complicates what is expressly stated in the novel, leading to new interpretations of characters in the films. For instance, the director purposefully chose to represent the Bennet family as more working class than the novel demonstrates—with simple costuming and servants frequently working, farm animals in the shot—though Austen does make it clear that the family lives on a farm with only one horse. This new importance placed on visible class separations is divergent from the 1940 and 1995 adaptations and allows for a different reading of critical scenes in the novel, sometimes implying that Elizabeth perhaps does marry Mr. Darcy for material gain. No matter the historic circumstance, each of the three directors were very mindful when shooting the film adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, and were strategic in the ways they changed the novel. Each film can be seen as having a particular vision they wished to promote about women, marriage, and materialism.

Chapter 3: Elizabeth Bennet

The protagonist of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet is known for her intelligence, wit, and occasional unconventional behavior in ways that allow her to become a figure that transcends time, a role model for progressive women throughout history. A. Sue Parrill summarizes Austen's heroines well: the women "are never described as beautiful; they are, however, usually presented as superior to more beautiful female characters. They win their men with intelligence, probity of character, and persistence" (Parrill 144). And although her sister Jane represents the ideal of the obedient, beautiful young woman of the time, Elizabeth is the heroine of the novel and the character readers love.

Elizabeth is very intelligent and it shines through in her witty discussions and moral character. Intelligence in Austen novels is always rewarded, despite the fact that women at the time were given only minimal education and were encouraged to avoid outshining the men in their lives. Elizabeth tactfully resists boasting or displaying her brilliance, a quality Mary and Caroline Bingley are lacking. Other characters praise Elizabeth's intelligence, especially her father, who favors her and also says she has "greatness of mind" for predicting Lydia's elopement with Mr. Wickham (Austen 285). Elizabeth is observant and quick-witted and also behaves more honorably than other characters in the novel. For example, when Elizabeth is presented with the opportunity to marry for wealth, she rejects the advantageous marriage, unlike other characters such as her friend Charlotte, who marries Mr. Collins in order to secure a home. Elizabeth waits for someone she can respect as well as love, only accepting Mr. Darcy after he proves his character. Neckles considers her to be a model "not of virtue nor beauty nor intelligence (though she possesses all of these qualities) but of sociability" (37). In particular,

Elizabeth sets herself apart from all other females including the Bingleys and her sisters—even Jane—through her witty dialogues with Mr. Darcy.

Elizabeth's keen tongue gives her the ability to fight against Mr. Darcy's sometimes domineering power. And it is what demonstrates Elizabeth's intelligence. In the novel, Elizabeth even maintains power amid the financial difficulties that plague her family. Paraphrasing Judith Lowder Newton, Brosh comments on the way Elizabeth's intelligence overshadows her situation: "Although Elizabeth faces dangerous economic circumstances, Newton claims, we do not experience her as powerless" (Brosh 151). We still see her as more moral than Caroline, Lydia, Mrs. Bennet, and even Mr. Darcy, even though she is not higher, economically or socially, because that power comes from her mind.

Another way that Elizabeth demonstrates her intelligence is the balance between being humble and recognizing her self-worth. During one of the country balls, Sir William Lucas tries to set Elizabeth up with Mr. Darcy, who seems willing enough to dance. Elizabeth says resolutely, "I entreat you not to suppose that I moved this way in order to beg for a partner" (Austen 24). This encounter allows Mr. Darcy to see that Elizabeth is different from her cohorts in that she does not behave as if she is desperate for a husband or awed by this wealth and status. It is clear again later when Elizabeth is pitted against the Bingley sisters to prove that she is not conceited and never simply assumed Mr. Darcy loves her—or that she has a chance with him—like Caroline Bingley. Edward Copeland believes that unlike some of the other women who are too anxious, Elizabeth shows that "by keeping a critical distance from both the ideal of woman and Mr. Darcy himself, she enchants him" (Copeland 52). The "ideal of woman" is illustrated in a scene Copeland analyzes where Caroline Bingley invites Elizabeth to walk around so that Mr. Darcy can supposedly watch them better and admire Caroline's superior figure. Clearly, Caroline

is very aware of her own attractiveness, and Elizabeth's refusal to join in is what woos Mr. Darcy in her favor over Caroline. Elizabeth refuses to allow herself to be objectified on many occasions throughout the novel. In a scene where Mr. Darcy stares at her while the Bingley sisters play piano, she wonders if he stares because he finds her attractive:

She hardly knew how to suppose that she could be an object of admiration to so great a man; and yet that he should look at her because he disliked her was still more strange. She could only imagine however, at last, that she drew his notice because there was something about her more wrong and reprehensible, according to his idea of right, than in any other person present. The supposition did not pain her. She liked him too little to care for his approbation. (Austen 48)

The way Elizabeth thinks through the encounter shows her modesty and ability to overlook what others think about her unpopular beliefs amongst high society.

Another way she overlooks what others think about her is by valuing her sister's health over her appearance. Early in the novel, upon arrival at Netherfield Park, Elizabeth again goes against popular belief about femininity and appearance. Louisa Bingley comments on the fact that Elizabeth's dress was "six inches deep in mud" (Austen 33). While Mr. Bingley pretends not to have noticed, obviously this faux pas catches the attention of the Bingley sisters and Mr. Darcy, who agrees that he would not want his sister behaving in this manner. But Brosh believes that Mr. Darcy has a different view of Elizabeth's lack of concern for her appearance: Elizabeth is simply "valuing her concern for her sister above conduct book imperatives regarding female dress" (150). As will be seen later, Elizabeth creates distance for herself from her sister Mary in the reader's mind because Mary frequently quotes these conduct books, which is a main reason why Mary is criticized by everyone in the novel. In marriage, Elizabeth does not suppress her

moral choices or lively spirit upon marriage, either. Elizabeth is the one who finally convinces Mr. Darcy to renew the relationship with Lady Catherine despite her objection to their marriage (Austen 369). This demonstrates Elizabeth's propensity towards forgiveness even towards those who have mistreated her.

The other character living in the couple's house at the conclusion of the novel is Mr. Darcy's young sister, Georgiana, who is shocked by the way Elizabeth interacts with Mr. Darcy in a "lively, sportive manner of talking" (Austen 369). It is this spirit, however, that allows Elizabeth to become the perfect partner for Mr. Darcy intellectually. And yet every character has a flaw, and Elizabeth's is very clear—so clear it is in the title. Especially when compared to her sweet sister Jane, "Elizabeth is more likely to say what she thinks and to make hasty judgements about people" (Parrill 144). But it is her growth away from her prejudices, paired with Mr. Darcy's rejection of pride, that allows them to form an ideal couple. As is always true with adaptations, like the three analyzed here, the painting is distorted to fit the time in which the art is being created (or recreated). Certain scenes that define Elizabeth's character in the novel are revised or removed completely and rewrite her character. Some scenes are invented for the same effect. And these subtle differences are what define a generation and what is important to them in terms of how female characters are portrayed.

Elizabeth Bennet has long been analyzed as a character who resists some of the conventions of the society in which she lives, openly displaying her intelligence in a tactful way, refusing to marry simply for wealth, and disregarding her appearance. However, the 1940 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* contains a scene that subverts this aspect of her character, making her seem more materialistic, placing more importance on physical appearance. This is an invented scene only observed in the 1940 film that challenges what we think of Elizabeth and her

relationship to the gender ideologies of the time. In this scene, one of the balls featured in the novel is held outside, giving Elizabeth the opportunity to prove her athleticism to Mr. Darcy by practicing archery. Mr. Darcy shoots three arrows but misses the center each time. He comments on how women could also learn how to shoot “at short range and with light bow” (Leonard). Elizabeth nods and simply picks up the bow and arrows. She shoots three arrows and hits the target with all three of them. She smirks at Mr. Darcy, who looks embarrassed. This scene initially appears to give power to women by stating that women can do just as much as men, and maybe even more. It goes against gender norms for women, who were expected to be unathletic and in need of male assistance. Some authors argue that this scene adds to Elizabeth’s characterization in the novel as intelligent. George Bluestone believes that “Elizabeth’s hand-eye co-ordination may be read as a proxy for her intellectual ability” (qtd. in Raitt 128). In his eyes, the additional scene does not really confuse Elizabeth’s characterization that is so clear in the novel. But shortly after this scene, Caroline Bingley teases Elizabeth for shooting the bow. Elizabeth begins to cry because she is embarrassed and ashamed of herself. She worries that she appeared inappropriately masculine to Mr. Darcy. Because she is so upset by this prospect, the audience is left to believe that Elizabeth has given in to the gender roles of the society in which she lives. This completely undermines Elizabeth’s character as not overly concerned with how she is perceived.

As demonstrated in this film, for women, marriage was considered much more important than intellectual development. Beauty of course helped attract a husband, and except for her “fine eyes” (Austen 25) Elizabeth is not described as conventionally beautiful. In the film, however, Elizabeth is more traditionally pretty and worries about her appearance more than in the novel. Elizabeth’s beauty is her defining feature instead of her intelligence. She might even

fit the description of Jane in the novel as the most beautiful of the sisters. This is significant because Jane is not as independent as Elizabeth, so the film's audience might subconsciously equate the two characters and view Elizabeth as even weaker. This version of *Pride and Prejudice* appears to undermine Elizabeth's intended purpose as a character, which is to challenge gender roles. This Elizabeth is just as crazy about Mr. Darcy as Jane is about Mr. Bingley. In conjunction with the fact that Jane takes a role more similar to her materialistic sisters, there really is no strong female. The 1940 adaptation may be even less progressive than the novel in this regard.

BBC changes where Elizabeth stands in relation to gender ideologies but is much more subtle in how it does so. While the dialog remains close to the novel, the acting definitely changes the implications of the dialog, which continues the 1940 concerns about appearance and marriage. The series adds one scene in which Jane and Elizabeth talk before bed, while Jane brushes her hair. Elizabeth says, "I am determined, nothing but the deepest love will induce me into matrimony. So I shall end an old maid" (Langton). Although she seems disappointed with this projection, she is not following what is expected of young women—to marry and be sure to marry well. To marry well, the man must have a certain income and be a gentleman with a good reputation. It has nothing to do with love. Elizabeth rejects this convention, but then in the film gazes longingly at Jane, brushing her long blond hair. The gaze conveys that she really envies Jane's beauty and wishes to be looked at by men in the same way as her sister. This seems to deviate from what is known about Elizabeth's determination in the novel to be sensible with men, only marrying if she found someone she can respect, and not putting too much importance on beauty.

The film continues to investigate Elizabeth's self-evaluation. In the following moments, Elizabeth is looking at herself in the same mirror. She tilts her face, trying to make herself look as beautiful as Jane. She fails, in her own eyes, and ends up blowing out the candle as a sign of defeat. Parrill comments on this scene saying that "in context of what has been established [about her financial situation], this act demonstrates her perception that with a dowry of only 1000 pounds and without great personal beauty, her prospects for marriage are not promising" (143). This defeat is what weakens Elizabeth's resolve to challenge gender roles. But in the novel, "we do not experience her as powerless" (Brosh 151) because Elizabeth is not afraid to end up alone. In this film, it seems she is. Again, the film might sacrifice the message that marriage is not the goal in a woman's life for a more relatable female character.

Women like Miss Bingley and Mrs. Bennet are satirized in *Pride and Prejudice* for viewing marriage as a transaction of property, which Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy find materialistic. In the novel, by rejecting Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy at first, Elizabeth proves that she values love over financial gain. Therefore, how these films treat this theme tells us a great deal about its ethos. Like the 1940 film, the 2005 adaptation seems to fail at recognizing Elizabeth's aversion to marrying for financial gain. At a party early in the film, Elizabeth tells Jane that her role is to smile for the men and eventually marry Mr. Bingley. Because they had just met Mr. Bingley, the sisters do not know anything about him other than that he is wealthy and admires Jane's beauty. So even though Elizabeth is determined to marry only for love, she is urging her sister to marry Mr. Bingley for his wealth.

In the novel, Jane urges Elizabeth to only marry Mr. Darcy for love, instead of the other way around. She tells her to "do anything rather than marry without affection" (Austen 355). Elizabeth proceeds to tell her reasoning for falling in love with Mr. Darcy. While the 2005 film

changes her character in a way that is meant to define Elizabeth as playfully concerned about Jane's appearance in the 2005 film, it really ignores Austen's intended purpose for her as someone who never gives in to these expectations for young women to be beautiful and marry well. In the novel, it is clear she will never marry for money, but the added dialog in the 2005 film directly addresses these concerns and changes Elizabeth's character.

There is a key scene in the novel that critics frequently point to as evidence that Elizabeth is persuaded to love Mr. Darcy because of his possessions. It is completely deleted from the 1940 film to deemphasize landed wealth and consumerism, which will be discussed in further detail later. The scene comes from a passage that documents Elizabeth's change of heart for Mr. Darcy while on vacation with her aunt and uncle. Elizabeth is talked into going to see Mr. Darcy's grounds at Pemberley while he is away, and there, she finds herself falling in love with Mr. Darcy as the housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds, compliments him:

There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original [Mr. Darcy] than she had ever felt at the height of their acquaintance. The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship!—how much of pleasure or pain was it in his power to bestow!—how much of good or evil must be done by him! Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character, and as she stood before the canvas on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before. (Austen 238)

What is clear here is that Elizabeth does not fall in love with Mr. Darcy because of his appearance, power, or wealth, though these things are remarkable. She falls in love with Mr. Darcy's ability to run his estate well and make others happy, the requirements for being a landed gentleman: "Part of the owner's image was to be hospitable to the public and have his house open for inspection" (Troost 483). He chooses to do good to others, though he has the power to do otherwise. Her original perception of him as proud is disproved by his servant, and this is the moment her mind is altered in regards to him.

It is mainly the 2005 film that many critics point to as evidence of Elizabeth's materialistic love for Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth gawks as the carriage stops in front of Pemberley, and then she laughs. Author George Raitt reads Elizabeth's reaction to Pemberley as her "[recognizing] the absurdity of Darcy's vanity" (134). He views Elizabeth's laugh as mocking Mr. Darcy. However, this scene could also be analyzed in a completely different way. Elizabeth appears to be laughing because she now sees the wealth that she could have married into. It becomes clearer that this is the case as she continues on the tour inside the house, heading off alone, away from the housekeeper. She is speechless and stunned, maybe even regretful at refusing his first offer of marriage. But because the housekeeper's role here is downplayed, this scene is altered and forces the viewer to question whether Elizabeth does fall in love with Mr. Darcy for his wealth. She actually falls in love, it seems, with Mr. Darcy's possessions and appearance—through not just a painting of him but a more expensive marble bust. This scene is problematic because it seems to establish that Elizabeth is materialistic, like the critics feared. In the 1995 BBC version, as well as in the novel, there is a scene where Elizabeth jokingly tells Jane that she fell in love with Mr. Darcy when she first saw his house. It is clear that they are joking in both of these cases, but the 2005 film seems to suggest, because the housekeeper is

silenced, that maybe Elizabeth really *did* fall in love with his wealth. In this aspect, she is no better than her sisters and continues to fuel the gender stereotypes of her time.

Chapter 4: Jane Bennet

Of all the characters in the novel with whom Austen shares her name, she chose the eldest daughter of the Bennet family. Jane is the perfect lady—beautiful, gracious, and caring. And though she lacks Elizabeth’s wit, she is clearly still intelligent, evidence being that Elizabeth trusts her with important information. This goes unrecognized by many, including the filmmakers and Mrs. Bennet, who frequently forces others to notice her daughter’s beauty and charm, and comments loudly on how her beauty which will save the family by attracting a wealthy man. It is made clear in the novel that Jane is the most beautiful of the sisters, her mother telling Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy, “I do not like to boast of my own child, but to be sure, Jane—one does not often see anybody better looking. It is what everybody says” (Austen 42). While everyone seems to comment on her beauty, Jane never does. Not only does she have remarkable beauty, she is also very humble and optimistic. She is described in the text as having “composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner” (Austen 20) as well as having the “greatest patience in the world...she has without exception the sweetest temper” (Austen 39). Jane is by far the most caring of the daughters, even to the point where she does “not look well” (Austen 278) caring for her nervous mother, a task that would drive anyone else insane. But Jane always obeys and seems happy to do so. In a letter to Elizabeth, Jane does not chide her mother’s ridiculousness but proves her devotion: “I cannot be long from my poor mother” (Austen 260). In fact, Jane never thinks ill of anybody, and so she is frequently mistaken about other characters’ motives: “All the world are good and agreeable in [her] eyes” (Austen 14). This is the

one flaw Jane is allowed—to be too nice, too trusting. Jane’s father even says that because Jane and Mr. Bingley are so “complying...every servant will cheat [them]” (Austen 332), again pointing to her angelic nature.

But though she seems to have the perfect character, Jane carries the weight of her mother and five sisters because they rely on her alone to marry well so that they are provided for when Mr. Bennet dies. Her mother even comments: “I was sure you could not be so beautiful for nothing!” (Austen 332). It makes it seem as if Jane’s only purpose is to be a lovely trinket for men to purchase so as to save the family financially. The film adaptations all vary in their depictions of Jane. The 1940 film undercuts the message of the novel by changing Jane’s character the most dramatically. She is presented as materialistic and vacuous, and other characters are revised as well. We see this in a scene where she is shopping and in another scene where she is sick at Mr. Bingley’s estate, in which both she and Mr. Bingley appear shallow and silly. The 1995 film is much more true to her character in the novel, which views her as the embodiment of an ideal obedient female, with one revision where she gives in to materialistic thoughts. And finally by the 2005 film, she is finally respected by her family as the eldest and gains intelligence, now predicting what Mr. Bingley is trying to say instead of the other way around.

In the 1940 film Jane is trivial when it comes to consumption, beauty, and men. She is very beautiful with dark hair, a feature that is divergent from other adaptations. Though she is the eldest sister, she looks to be much younger than Elizabeth. This reinforces the presentation of Jane as less mature than her sister. The opening scene, which is entirely invented by the filmmakers, positions Jane and Elizabeth as commodities in a store and brands them as materialistic and shallow. Mrs. Bennet and her daughters are in town shopping; Jane and

Elizabeth are there to buy cloth to make new dresses for the upcoming ball, Mary to find books, and Kitty and Lydia in search of men. Suddenly, two carriages pull up across the street from the shop Jane and Elizabeth are in carrying men—Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley—and their possessions. The women stop shopping and go to the window to stare at the men. An interesting thing occurs with the camera angles and the positioning of the women. Liora Brosh describes how the scene positions the two women as “both subjects and objects,” shopping and themselves being observed:

The women are both subjects and objects... Since the women are actually in the store and are looking at the men through the store side of the display window, they are in the same spatial position as any other item for sale in the store.

Moreover, they are buying the clothes that will make them visible objects of display, for the male characters and the camera’s gaze. Yet, at the same time, they are subjects making choices and shopping as much for materials as for men. (148-149)

In this scene introducing Jane as a character, her only comments concern how she will look at the ball and if the woman with the two men is a wife or sister, establishing her as vain and materialistic, caring only about her appearance and finding a potential match. The fact that all Jane knows about the men is their income and their possession of expensive carriages allows this scene to show how much importance Jane puts on marrying a rich man. She also appears to be unintelligent because the only lines she speaks are questions about how she will look at the ball or repetitions of what others say. Before the women are interrupted by the commotion outside, Elizabeth states confidently how she wants to look in her new dress at the ball. Jane replies by asking Elizabeth for her opinion of how she should look. She clearly has no ideas of her own to

offer and seems content with Elizabeth's reply of "adorable" (Leonard). This Jane is not smart. She is smallminded and only thinks of the dresses that will make her look beautiful for the men at the ball so she can marry one of them, much like Kitty and Lydia's mentality. Though that description is harsh, this Jane reflects the concept of women of the time period in which the film was made. In this adaptation, "Elizabeth and Jane do not differ from their mother and Lydia in their interest in clothes. Both daughters are obviously enjoying shopping for materials and both take pleasure in imagining what their dresses will look like" (Brosh 148). Marriage is the only thing to aspire for, so beauty and men *would* be all that Jane thinks about. This is so different from the novel that rewards Jane with a good marriage because she is so selfless and caring. By handing the marriage to her without working for it, the film condones materialism because the producer was trying to appeal to the consumerist culture in America during the 1940s. In doing this, it also ignores the messages from the novel.

Coming off the heels of *Gone with the Wind*, released in 1939, the 1940 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* seems to mimic fashion during the Civil War. The novel was written during the Regency period in England, and for reasons that have more to do with 1940s concerns, the director of the wartime film dresses his characters in costumes that would not have come into fashion for another 50 years. Kristen R. Loyd comments on this odd revision of Austen's novel: "All of the women resemble Scarlet O'Hara...to evoke images of the Civil War era, which might reasonably lead audiences to thinking about the war in Europe" (356). This tactic would have been used to persuade American audiences to get involved in the war in England by softening relations between the two countries. In fact, "Nostalgic female costuming...attempted to close the cultural gap" (356). These two countries were at odds with each other. In England, the monarchy was still reigning, while in America, the middle class was valued as the driving force

for consumerism. So by showing the Bennet family in a store buying dresses, the film summarizes a few points that American audiences could relate with—mainly consumerism and marriage. Brosh explains the shift in American culture during the 30s and 40s towards consumerism: “The novel has been re-situated within twentieth century consumer culture...A culture that values thrift and hard work was being replaced by a culture that valued a rising standard of living and the consumption that enabled it” (147). This consumer culture in America is echoed in the film, with ties to *Gone with the Wind* in order to create similarity between the countries for sympathy, leading Americans to support the British in the war. The main audience of all this consumption, however, was women. Women lived in the home and became “primary consumers of goods” (Brosh 148), like the Bennet women getting ready for the ball. Finding themselves at odds with Austen’s anti-consumerism message from the novel, “because Hollywood has a commercial stake in promoting consumption, it represents [buying goods] in positive terms, more positively than does Jane Austen” (Brosh 150). So Jane’s drastic character change is because of the historical moment that the film was released.

The film’s objective, to get American audiences to join the war, sought to connect to female consumers living in a democracy by downplaying the monarchical system because “most Americans had a negative perception of Great Britain as a colonial power...therefore, filmmakers focused on England’s domestic scene” (Loyd 354). Women not only were the main source of consumption in America, they were also hoping to find husbands, largely a theme that is looked down upon in the novel. But the film allows those marriage-for-gain desires to be seen in a positive light, Elizabeth even giving in to beauty and conduct standards to please Mr. Darcy. In the film, “women’s desire to marry is presented as an ageless international theme that connects Britons and Americans...Americans could finally relate to the English through this

presumably common female experience” (Loyd 355). So not only do the film makers present consumerism as a common tie between England and America, they also present marriage as a driving force for women. The message from the novel, because Elizabeth refuses to marry based on any motive other than respect and love, is downplayed. Therefore, Mrs. Bennet and her younger daughters are shown in a more positive light than any of the other films. The film also presents Jane as simple-minded, rather than a moral, good-natured, and intelligent character in the novel.

In another scene, telling of the film’s attitudes towards Jane’s intelligence (and other women by extension), Jane is sick in bed at Mr. Bingley’s estate, Netherfield Park. The doctor gives a medical diagnosis in Latin, and Jane looks worried with each unfamiliar phrase. Coming to her rescue, Mr. Bingley readily offers a more simple translation:

Dr. Macintosh: The epidermis seems to have lost its sudorific activity. I detect distinct symptoms of pyrexia.

Jane: Oh—is that bad, Dr. Macintosh?

Mr. Bingley: He just means you're rather feverish, Miss Jane.

Jane: Oh.

What is probably meant to be a light-hearted scene continues to portray Jane as unintelligent. This is not the case in the 2005 film, however, where Jane predicts what Mr. Bingley is actually trying to say, a sign that she is much more sophisticated and intelligent than the 1940’s Jane. This seems to reflect the time period the films were produced, representative of society’s acceptance or rejection of gender assumptions about woman as unintelligent consumers, despite Elizabeth being very well-read and very intelligent in the novel, traits Mr. Darcy admires in her.

BBC's 1995 television series of *Pride and Prejudice* comes at a different historical moment when women held important positions in the workplace and were challenging commonly held beliefs about female intelligence and worth. But despite this fact, they present Jane as even less intelligent. She is blond, pretty, and very quiet. She is obedient to a fault. Again, her only purpose in life is to raise the fortunes of her family. This idea has stemmed from both her parents and sisters. Parrill argues that the actresses who play Elizabeth and Jane—already contrasting characters in the novel, one who challenges society and one who is a perfect model of society's expectations—enhance the differences between themselves in the 1995 film. She says that “Jane almost always appears calm, is reticent to show her feelings, and can be depended upon to think the best of everyone” (144). Though Parrill's description of Jane appears to be positive, she also contrasts Jane's character with Elizabeth's intelligence, implying that Jane does not come across as smart. And she does not. By allowing herself to be more vulnerable to Mr. Bingley, she appears more susceptible to her emotions, a trait she continues to display throughout the film.

There are many different scenarios in the film where Jane simply agrees with what others want or say. She never adds her own opinions to conversations. This makes Jane seem lacking in opinions, which demonstrates that women in nineteenth-century England felt obliged to be “agreeable.” Elizabeth appears to be the only character who openly speaks her mind without fear of reprimand. However, even if the time period discouraged quarreling or female self-assertion, this film adaptation unlike others does nothing to counteract these antiquated social norms.

The films vary from the novel as well in how they present Jane's reaction to her engagement. The films subtly imply that Jane is pleased at the material advantages the marriage offers the family—whereas in the novel, Jane is far removed from such considerations. In a

scene from the 1995 adaptation directly after Mr. Bingley has proposed, Jane expresses how happy she is to Elizabeth. But it seems that her happiness does not come from the engagement alone. She tells her sister, “To know I shall be giving such pleasure to all my dear family, how should I bear so much happiness?” (Langton). In the context of the film, this line indicates that she is happy because she is securing her family with a prosperous future once her father dies. The difference in comparison with the novel is obvious: “Oh! Lizzy,” Jane delights, “to know that what I have to relate will give such pleasure to all my dear family! how shall I bear so much happiness!” (Austen 330). The removal of “what [she has] to relate” is important. In the novel, it is clear that she expects them to be happy for her because she is engaged. In the film, her family is happy for her because she is marrying Mr. Bingley and his money. The sentence from the film might end like this: “to know I shall be giving such pleasure to all my dear family” *by marrying Mr. Bingley*. This raises serious implications about Jane’s motive behind marrying Mr. Bingley—for money or love? It is obvious that Jane’s family will be happy that they are financially secure, but it seems to imply that even Jane is getting pleasure out of the financial gain, not because she loves Mr. Bingley. The novel does not imply that Jane is excited about his wealth and connections, so the pressure is lessened from Jane’s shoulders in the novel, and she seems less of a mercenary for hire by her family, taking pleasure in the new money she, and them by extension, will come in to.

The Jane Bennet of the 2005 film is very different from her previous depictions and deviates from the passive, unintelligent character who Parrill sees in the 1995 version. While she is still beautiful and seeks to marry Mr. Bingley, as is true of Jane in the novel and other depictions, she seems much more intelligent and respected. Jane is the eldest Bennet sister and finally acts accordingly. The viewer can sense respect coming from Elizabeth to her older sister

that is for more than just Jane's beauty. In this adaptation, Jane is seen chiding her sisters, even kicking Elizabeth under the table. In a scene where one of the younger sisters, Lydia, skips around her commenting on her beauty around Mr. Bingley, Jane scolds her frivolity through her tone, saying, "Oh, Lydia!" (Wright). This demonstrates that Jane is sensible and humble when it comes to her own beauty but also a teacher of socially acceptable behavior to her younger sisters. In contrast to the 1940 film, Jane shows her intelligence through many scenes in which she chooses the perfect word as she guesses what Mr. Bingley is trying unsuccessfully to say:

Mr. Bingley: It fills me with guilt. I'm not a good reader. I prefer being out of doors. Oh, I mean, I can read, of course. And I'm not suggesting you can't read out of doors.

Jane: I wish I read more, but there seem to be so many other things to do.

Mr. Bingley: Yes, that's exactly what I meant.

This shows that she *is* well-read and also not too overcome by Mr. Bingley's appearance, charm, or wealth. In one final scene, Jane proves her intelligence when she sees through Mr. Wickham's charm, without having known him for very long, and recognizes that he is being deceitful, looking to enhance his wealth. This is notable because Jane is constantly characterized as seeing the good in everyone and being too trusting of everyone she encounters. When Mr. Wickham turns out to be the antagonist, it should not surprise the viewer because Jane has already predicted the fact. So although Jane must still be true to the novel by maintaining her obsession with Mr. Bingley, she can counteract the gender assumption that women must marry in order to be happy—and be guided by their wiser husbands—by proving her intelligence.

Chapter 5: Mary Bennet

The middle child of the Bennet family, Mary Bennet is ignored by all and disliked for being pretentious, oblivious, and didactic. Neither beautiful nor intelligent, Mary is frequently seen reading, playing piano, and singing badly. She struggles to be what Elizabeth is naturally: charming and intelligent. The novel comments on this very point saying, “Mary, who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display. Mary had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner” (Austen 23). Neither the narrator nor the characters display sympathy for Mary in part perhaps because she flaunts false skill and knowledge. She is oblivious to the even more crucial expectation of young women to display modesty. Unlike her sisters, she takes pleasure in reports of her skills: “Mary had heard herself mentioned to Miss Bingley as the most accomplished girl in the neighbourhood” (Austen 12). This line comes right after a list of what satisfied each family member about the ball—dancing with young men, for instance. Despite having made a fool of herself, she believes she has done well playing at the ball, even when no one claps for her. Mary’s behavior in this moment is what gives Mr. Darcy reason enough to steer Mr. Bingley away from Jane, which nearly destroys all the girls’ prospects with the young men. Mr. Darcy tells Elizabeth in a letter that there was a “total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by [her mother], by [her] three younger sisters, and occasionally even by [her] father” (Austen 189). So not only is Mary oblivious to social cues, the narrator implies, despite all her reading, she is not intelligent or insightful. At a ball when asked her opinion, Austen writes: “Mary wished to say something sensible but knew not how” (Austen 7). This line

is indicative of Mary's lack of intelligence, suggested by her inability to be sociable like Elizabeth, a key feature that distinguishes Mary from her sisters.

Mary is also presented unsympathetically because of her association with Mr. Collins, who is presented as equally unskilled in social interactions. They share many of the same qualities, both quoting books, never giving an original thought, and displaying their false knowledge when no one else wants them to. For good reason, Edward Copeland calls Mary "the novel's house moralist" (Copeland 50). We even get a hint that she would have happily received a proposal from Mr. Collins: "She rated his abilities much higher than any of the others; there was a solidity in his reflections which often struck her, and though by no means so clever as herself, she thought that if encouraged to read and improve himself by such an example as her, he might become a very agreeable companion" (Austen 119). Like Mary, Mr. Collins memorizes books—in his case to recite as "genuine" compliments. The two appear to mirror each other in many ways, and for this reason, the narrator invites readers to judge Mary.

Mary, like her sisters, is in a very difficult position, facing poverty if she does not marry but at the same time threatening her sisters' chances with men too. Because she does not have the beauty or accomplishments that might replace wealth in a man's eyes, Mary most likely is destined to become an "old maid." The novel itself accords her little sympathy, and many of the films fail to do this as well. In part this is because the novel, using free indirect discourse, presents the world through Elizabeth's perceptions. At times, this makes Elizabeth appealing as a character, given this lack of sympathy. Christina Neckles comments on this: "*Pride and Prejudice* sanctions a lack of sympathy for people who do not 'deserve' it—who are silly, shallow, pedantic, or naïve" (Neckles 32). Mary definitely comes off as pedantic in the novel, and this is why the novel gets away with treating Mary in such a harsh manner.

On the other hand, when a visual dimension is added, it would be reasonable to expect that Mary would seem more sympathetic because the viewer can see her reactions. While the films vary in how harshly they present her, none make her a completely sympathetic character. Frequently dressed in dreary clothing, she does not attempt to make herself look pretty. She has no friends, either. She might be the only character who truly does not give in to society's repressive expectations concerning beauty and modesty. And yet, in each film adaptation, she is never taken seriously and frequently is the character who is disliked. In keeping with the novel, she is always filmed playing the piano badly, making insensitive comments, and in general acting as a comic figure, criticized by her sisters for her lack of social grace. And in keeping with the novel's presentation of the world through Elizabeth's eyes, the adaptations continue to present Mary as unintelligent, taking the brunt of other characters' irritations. The 2005 film is the only adaptation in which we see the beginnings of sympathy given for Mary. In one critical scene, Elizabeth is the one who is overly irritated, shown yelling at an innocent Mary.

In the 1940 film, in which Jane and Elizabeth are praised for their intelligence, Mary is pushed to the side. She tries very hard to be accepted, yet she always fails. Simply by noting her costumes, it is evident in the 1940 adaptation that Elizabeth controls the narrative. Her dresses and hats overwhelm the screen just as Elizabeth overwhelms the majority of the script. It forces other characters to interject or else not be seen or heard. Mary "often pops up or pushes in to her sister's conversations" (Neckles 33). Even when she does this, her sisters glare at her. In the opening scenes of the 1940 adaptation, Mary is at the bookstore while her sisters are shopping for dresses. Her sisters roll their eyes at Mary because she has no interest in dress shopping or spying on the new bachelors in town. Lydia even spits, "you and your books" (Leonard). This hatred warns women that they *should* care about marriage and shopping, and if they do not, they

will be shunned. Furthermore, without the full context of the novel, Mary Bennet is the character who seems to warn the audience that women should never seem to be too smart. Because she never quotes conduct books and is not as arrogant as in the novel, this Mary is a little more sympathetic, but she still a comic figure, as is evident in a scene filmed at the ball. In keeping with her pleasing attitude, Mary obeys her mother by putting on a large, fake grin at the ball to impress the men; she does not smile in any of the other films. Here, she pretends to be just as excited about men as her sisters in order to fit in. The Mary that stands as a warning against boasting and moralizing in the novel is gone, and *Pride and Prejudice*, the moral novel, becomes a simple romantic comedy.

Mary in the 1995 film is much more true to the novel, frequently quoting conduct books. She tells her sisters that all she finds enjoyable in life is reading, and she hates town. Her sisters ignore her or roll their eyes at her when she deviates from what is acceptable. Her mother is particularly critical of her, telling her at one of the balls, “no one wants to hear your concertos here” (Langton) and saying, “Who asked you?” when Mary puts in her opinion about moving north. In a very telling scene, Mary reads the room totally wrong. At dinner one day, just after Lydia has eloped with Mr. Wickham, Kitty mentions how she does not think Lydia did anything wrong. Mary notices an opportunity to enlighten her sister about how Lydia has affected the family. Their aunt tries to stop her, but Mary ignores her, quoting standard conduct book advice by saying, “A woman’s reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful, and therefore, we cannot be too guarded in our behavior towards the undeserving of the other sex” (Langton). After saying this, Elizabeth thanks her, clearly irritated by Mary’s comment, trying to quiet her hurtful comments. Mary smiles as if she appreciates the thanks. In the novel, it happens a little differently. After making the comment, Elizabeth simply ignores her because she is too

depressed to talk about Lydia. One critic argues that Mary's driving force in this scene is acceptance: "Only in 'perceiving' Elizabeth's indifference does Mary launch into the conduct-book paraphrases that warn 'loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable'" (Neckles 37). It would seem as if this scene in the novel is more true to her representation in the 1940 film, trying to please her family. But the 1995 film does not give her the same kind of sympathy because she still preaches to her sisters and is oblivious to her aunt and Elizabeth's censure. Mary comes off as pedantic in the novel, and this film is true to this characterization. Austen's tone towards Mary is just as critical as it is lighthearted, joking about the awkward sister, making it acceptable to dislike her because of Mary's arrogant attitude. Audiences are more sympathetic towards her when these things are cut, as in the case in the 2005 film. But her purpose in the 1995 adaptation is much more similar to the novel.

For the 2005 film, a plain but not ugly actress was chosen to portray Mary, and true to Mary in the novel, the 2005 Mary always plays piano. But it does not seem like she does it for attention. It truly seems that Mary loves to play piano and talking with neighbors seems trivial to her. She does not try to put on a show of smiles for attention like the 1940's Mary does, either. But the 2005 film frequently switches dialogue around so that what other characters say in the novel becomes Mary's line in the film. In the novel, it is Caroline Bingley who tries to suggest—while in the company of Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy, and her brother—that a ball would be "much more rational if conversation instead of dancing were made the order of the day" (Austen 52-53). With this comment, she seems to seek to distinguish herself from Elizabeth in Mr. Darcy's mind by establishing that the Bennet girls, who love balls, are too frivolous and trifling for him. She is a much more sensible partner. Mr. Bingley recognizes the intent behind his sister's words and says, "Much more rational, my dear Caroline, I dare say, but it would not be near so much like a

ball” (Austen 53). Caroline is called out for trying to manipulate Mr. Darcy. In the 2005 film, however, Mary is the one who says this, and Caroline is the one who comments that it would be “less like a ball” (Wright). By changing the speaker, the shame is shifted from Caroline, who rightfully deserves it, to Mary, who in this film elicits a lot more sympathy than animosity. Her childlike characterization makes her words a little thoughtless but more so like a little sister trying to solidify her own character.

This dialogue is changed a second time, but in this instance, it concerns the importance of men to women. In the novel, Elizabeth is the one who poses a light-hearted question to her aunt, just after they talk about Mr. Wickham courting Miss King. She asks, “What are young men to rocks and mountains?” (Austen 149). However, in the 2005 film, Mary says this in front of the girls’ aunt and uncle after Elizabeth expresses her excitement at traveling with them to see the Lake Country. Later, while they are on the trip, their carriage breaks down and the uncle mocks Mary, addressing Elizabeth’s spoken fear of seeing Pemberley in case Mr. Darcy is at home. When Elizabeth says this in the novel, it establishes her as irreverent and unconcerned about Mr. Wickham’s choices. But when Mary says it in the film, she seems brooding or bitter that she is not allowed to go on vacation with her sister. It reflects well on Elizabeth but not on Mary, although it does draw attention to how Mary is generally neglected. Other scenes that include Mary emphasize her childlike absentmindedness. The night after Mr. Bingley has proposed to Jane, a carriage pulls back on to the Bennet’s property. The family races downstairs to see who it is. In front of Jane, Mary wonders, “maybe he’s changed his mind” (Wright). Jane pays no attention to the comment, ignoring Mary as usual. But the comment reinforces her youthful ignorance to social cues and her lack of tact. While Mary is much more visible and sympathetic in this film, it also points to changing ideologies about women that make this film the most

progressive. And though changes are made, these changes are rooted in modern culture, influenced by feminist movements.

Chapter 6: Georgiana Darcy

As an example of what a young, upper-class woman should be, the novel gives us Georgiana, the polite, accomplished, respectful, fifteen-year-old sister of Mr. Darcy. A primary role for the lady of the manor was to entertain gracefully, so naturally playing piano and singing were the most acceptable accomplishments for young women. Georgiana is always described as highly accomplished. Caroline says she is “extremely accomplished for her age! Her performance on the pianoforte is exquisite” (Austen 36). Even Mr. Wickham, who attempted to elope with her, says she is “a handsome girl, about fifteen or sixteen, and, I understand, highly accomplished. Since her father’s death, her home has been in London, where a lady lives with her and superintends her education” (Austen 78). When Elizabeth is visiting Pemberley, Mr. Darcy’s home, the housekeeper tells the family that Georgiana is “the handsomest young lady that ever was seen; and so accomplished! She plays and sings all day long” (Austen 236). If there was a fault by the standards of this time, it would be that she is very shy and quiet. Elizabeth finds her “exceedingly shy...there was sense and good humour in her face, and her manners were perfectly unassuming and gentle” (Austen 248). The troubling line from the novel about Georgiana says that “Miss Darcy looked as if she wished for courage enough to join in [the conversation]; and sometimes did venture a short sentence, when there was least danger of it being heard” (Austen 255). While she is young, she is clearly a product of her time. The schooling she receives does not increase her confidence or ability to make conversation, only her skills at the piano and her sense of deference. The novel implies that Georgiana will gain

confidence and social skill by being around Elizabeth. Again, Austen is commenting on the faults of the upper classes and saying that a middle class female has the power to teach the upper classes how to be sociable and accepting. But when Georgiana is presented in films, she has little depth, and the implications of Austen's conclusion are lost.

Though she is a minor character, Georgiana is completely removed from the 1940 adaptation and only gets screen time in the 2005 film at Mr. Darcy's home. But in the BBC's 1995 television series, we also hear and see more of her relationship with other characters, including Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy, and Mr. Wickham. She is very young when Mr. Wickham courts her, without Mr. Darcy's permission, and nearly seduced into marrying him without her brother's consent. Mr. Darcy rescues her from Mr. Wickham, who surely sought her wealth and revenge on Mr. Darcy. Mr. Darcy "appears as Georgiana's rescuer, banishing Mr. Wickham and tenderly comforting Georgiana" (Parrill 145). The scene has more to do with Mr. Darcy's characterization as a good protector than it does Georgiana's, but it presents her as helpless and naive. Even for the standards of the time for women, she seems incapable. Presenting Georgiana in this way supports the idea of women as helpless and shallow and in need of men as saviors.

Intriguingly, in the 1995 film, Mr. Darcy is not Georgiana's only savior. Elizabeth also comes to her rescue. One evening at Pemberley, as Georgiana is playing piano, Caroline Bingley mentions Mr. Wickham to Elizabeth, trying to tease her about her family's love for the military men. At hearing his name, Georgiana's fingers falter on the keys. Mr. Darcy begins to stand, but before he can act, Elizabeth hastens over to Georgiana to provide cover for her discomfort, saying, "I'm so sorry. I'm neglecting you. How can you play with no one turning the pages? There, allow me" (Langton). Georgiana seems pacified, and Mr. Darcy sinks back into the couch, realizing that Elizabeth is just the kind of woman he, and Georgiana, needs. This scene is

another in which Georgiana is shown as very young and easily persuaded, but the scene is not about her. It demonstrates that Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy will be equals and that they both will have something to contribute to the relationship, especially once they have children of their own. It just comes at the expense of Georgiana.

Chapter 7: Lady Catherine de Bourgh

It is clear that in *Pride and Prejudice* Jane Austen attempts to address the intersection of class and gender in early nineteenth-century England. As discussed earlier, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, the wealthy aristocratic aunt of Mr. Darcy, is stuck in the tradition of marrying to maintain status and wealth, not for love. She says she prefers “to have the distinction of rank preserved” (Austen 155) and condescends to those of the trading and middle classes; indeed, she opposes any deviations from the ancient hierarchy and the roles of those within in. One of the most arrogant characters in the novel, someone who represents the failings of the ancient system of rank, Lady Catherine is often a comical character, as well as a warning of what Mr. Darcy could become. As described by Mr. Wickham, Lady Catherine’s “manners were dictatorial and insolent. She has the reputation of being remarkably sensible and clever: but I rather believe she derives part of her abilities from her rank and fortune, part from her authoritative manner, and the rest from the pride of her nephew” (Austen 80).

Austen critiques members of the upper class who believe that rank, not morals or actions, determine one’s value, and Lady Catherine is a prime example of such a character—even though neither she nor her daughter are “accomplished” at singing or playing piano. Lady Catherine still believes strongly in her own abilities and value, saying that “there are few people in England...who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or a better natural taste.” So

convinced is she that rank trumps actual accomplishment that she considers her inability (and her daughter's) to actually play the piano irrelevant. She assures the room of this: "If I had ever learned, I should have been a great proficient. And so would Anne, if her health had allowed her" (Austen 166). The film adaptations all depict this scene, which clearly and comically presents her arrogance and a self-worth derived entirely from her position rather than her accomplishments. Clearly, as shown in the novel, Lady Catherine can be just as offensive as Elizabeth's mother, and although Anne's reaction is not described, we can imagine that it embarrassing her daughter (who rarely says a word). Elizabeth even characterizes Lady Catherine as "insolent and disagreeable" (Austen 336). When she receives Elizabeth, Charlotte, and Mr. Collins at her home, she fails to show much kindness. The narrator describes her unsympathetically: "Lady Catherine was a tall, large woman, with strongly marked features, which might once have been handsome. Her air was not conciliating, nor was her manner of receiving them, such as to make her visitors forget their inferior rank...whatever she said was spoken in so authoritative a tone as marked her self-importance" (Austen 156). Lady Catherine disapproves strongly of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's wedding, not only because she wishes Mr. Darcy to marry her daughter, but because of Elizabeth's inferior relations. But her character represents much more than a barrier to the romance, which is how she is presented in the film adaptations. As a wealthy, old woman insisting on her superiority to those not born to wealth or titles, she represents the dying aristocratic power in England, while Elizabeth represents the middle class that rejuvenates and infuses a new way of life into the ancient hierarchies.

The 1940s film makes dramatic changes to Lady Catherine's character, including changing her role in bringing Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth together—which in the novel she does inadvertently. She is also presented more sympathetically. In the novel, there is a scene in which

Lady Catherine arrives at the Bennet house, demanding to see Elizabeth. She asks if Elizabeth expects to be engaged to Mr. Darcy, an outrageous thought to her because that would mean someone in trade is lowering the status of the Darcy family. Furthermore, it was her understanding that Anne and Mr. Darcy would be married, a match planned by the two mothers. Elizabeth denies an engagement but refuses to promise never to enter into one. This is what gives Mr. Darcy the inspiration to propose a second time. In the film, during this pivotal scene, a power struggle occurs between the sexes. Lady Catherine arrives at the Bennet household and asks to speak to Elizabeth alone. She tells her that if Elizabeth were to marry Mr. Darcy, she would strip him of all his wealth: "I have the power to make [your marriage] impossible...I can strip Mr. Darcy of every shilling he has...And if he were to marry against my wishes, I should not hesitate in carrying out my power...marry him and you will be poor" (Leonard). After this intimidation, Elizabeth denies any ties to Mr. Darcy and demands that she be left alone. Lady Catherine then leaves. But it is at this moment that we learn Lady Catherine was just testing Elizabeth; she has no power over Mr. Darcy's money. Mr. Darcy is waiting outside in the carriage and later refers to his aunt as his "ambassador," because she was there to see if Elizabeth would marry him for love or money. He even says that he did not "give [Lady Catherine] leave to tell" Elizabeth about his involvement in saving Lydia's reputation by officially marrying her to Mr. Wickham. This scene is unique to the 1940 adaptation, and initially, it appears to bestow more power on Lady Catherine: In this case, by stripping Mr. Darcy of his estate if he defies her. But when it is revealed that Lady Catherine was only acting as Mr. Darcy's "ambassador" and that she really has no power over his finances (Leonard), that power is diminished. Brosh addresses the scene by saying that the film furthers an assumption that "women operate only in accordance with men's plans" (158). This idea relies on the caricature of wealthy women who

hold no individual power, trusting their husbands, sons, and nephews to be better caretakers of their finances. So it would seem that women have no power in reality, that “it raises the specter of women having control over men’s finances” (Brosh 158). Lady Catherine “ultimately allows herself to be seen as a tyrant to help Darcy” (Neckles 38). In this regard, she appears to be controlled by her nephew without recognizing it. This scene serves as a testimony to the influence that the patriarchal society of the past still has on the present, especially because it was a scene that was added for the movie. This adaptation suggests that a century after the novel was written, it was unacceptable for a woman to have power over a man. But instead of a woman abusing her power, as it seems in the novel, Lady Catherine is Mr. Darcy’s tool, conforming to gender roles. Not only this, it downplays a class critique because, as mentioned previously, the film needed to close the cultural gap, and therefore, works to downplay rank distinctions.

The film, in revising Lady Catherine’s character, also serves to downplay the novel’s concerns with class. Lady Catherine in the film deviates from the novel in that she approves of Mr. Darcy’s marrying Elizabeth, saying, “what you need is a woman who will stand up to you” (Leonard). This also softens the disapproval American audiences may have felt towards English class system. Mr. Darcy even tells Elizabeth that Lady Catherine liked her because she is frank and does not flatter her, which implies that Lady Catherine is tired of all the privilege and deference she receives because of it. In fact, “Lady Catherine is represented as someone who learns to admire Elizabeth and therefore favor the match between her and Mr. Darcy. Thus, the marriages at the end of the film represent the democratization of the upper classes in Britain” (Brosh 149). Critics argue that the 1940 film was designed to close the cultural gaps between American viewers and England. By shifting the power out of the hands of the upper class (represented by Lady Catherine), the middle class (represented by Elizabeth) triumphs in the

eyes of an American audience. The shift is “modernizing England which is learning to reject class and inherited wealth in favour of democracy and love” (qtd. in Brosh 149). In this scene, the filmmakers attempt to close the divide the democratic United States and the monarchical England, even if it consequently takes power away from women.

The next adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, in 1995, presents the scene more faithfully. However, instead of women losing power to men, there appears to be a battle between two women. Lady Catherine once again disapproves of a marriage between the two main characters due to money and class. Upon arrival by carriage to the Bennet household in fancy attire, she notices what she calls a “pretty-ish kind of little wilderness” (Langton). This is in reference to a small garden in which she wishes to speak to Elizabeth alone. By choosing the word “wilderness,” Lady Catherine has insulted the Bennet family. She is implying that a part of the yard is wild and unkempt, a sign that the family is not wealthy enough to have groundskeepers. In the garden, Elizabeth tells Lady Catherine that she and Mr. Darcy “are equal” (Langton). Lady Catherine replies by saying that her family is insignificant, another insult to her class. Therefore, it would seem that the upper class is emphasized by the characters in the film and wins this argument; however, Lady Catherine’s argument is lessened, given the surroundings. In this adaptation, the Bennet house is large and the gardens well cared for; Elizabeth wears nice clothing, and her hair is curled and put up nicely. These are all symbols of high class and subverts Lady Catherine’s claim that Elizabeth belongs to a lesser class. For this reason, the power is not held by any class. It is clear that power is lost, though, because Lady Catherine is sent away in her carriage, clearly offended. So the interrogation scene therefore serves as a defeat of an older woman. The power seems to be held by younger women. In this sense, women battle themselves. Historically, women during the nineties had more power over men than ever

before in society, the workplace included. Things were beginning to shift away from the patriarchal society, but women still were not equal. This very idea gets reflected in the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*.

When seen in contrast with the 1995 adaptation, the interrogation scene of the 2005 film portrays more clearly a triumph of the middle class over the upper class. In the 1995 version, the orderly Bennet house and Elizabeth's appearance make it difficult to define clear class lines. However, in the 2005 film, this scene creates a dramatic contrast between the classes. Lady Catherine comes in her elegant gown to the Bennet house during the night while Elizabeth and her family are wearing their nightclothes. The objects that identified them previously as upper-middle class are now gone, so the class division between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine is much more clearly recognized by the audience of the 2005 adaptation. Due to this difference in appearance, when Elizabeth forces Lady Catherine out of the house, the upper class, represented by Lady Catherine, is much more clearly overthrown by a lower class, represented by Elizabeth. To further this point, Lady Catherine is forced to open the door herself, in contrast to when she first walked in and Mr. Bennet opened the door for her; as she leaves, servants are seen in the background watching. The servants in the background emphasize a defeat of the upper class by the lower classes. Because both women have incredible strength as characters, it is not women who lose power in the 2005 adaptation. This Elizabeth is the character who rejects her society the strongest. She is very different from the 1995 Elizabeth who, when overwhelmed by the quarrel with Lady Catherine, says, "I must beg to return to the house" (Langton). This Elizabeth tells Lady Catherine "to leave immediately" (Wright). The conclusion that is drawn from this adaptation is that the upper class is losing power to the lower and middle classes. During the time of this movie's release, women had equal opportunities as men in the workplace. This reflects in

the adaptation by eliminating gender as a factor over which to struggle for power. Instead, the lower and middle classes are triumphing over the upper class.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

Many differences can be drawn from the 1940, 1995, and 2005 adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* about the various female characters. None of the female characters, but especially Elizabeth and Jane, are ever shown at full potential that the novel allows for Elizabeth. Each film progresses in terms of how much each character gives in to cultural expectations about materialism and physical appearance. The 2005 film goes beyond the novel and begins to create sympathy towards silenced characters like Mary and Georgiana. Each of these films is highly affected by the historical moment and the cultural expectations surrounding women, which allows viewers to track a progression towards gender equality. So although *Pride and Prejudice* is a beloved classic, there are many criticisms about how women and class are viewed in the novel and adaptations alike. It is interesting to speculate how differently the female characters would be portrayed today and if it would be the most progressive yet, building off the beginnings of feminism seen in some of the adaptations. Elizabeth has the potential to fit the “strong female character” trope seen in movies such as *The Hunger Games* (2012), *Divergent* (2014), and *Moana* (2016). *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2016) is an interesting rewrite of Elizabeth’s character that begins to embody this ideal of strong female leads with a cultural twist. Overall, it is obvious that films are deeply rooted in the historical moment, but each seems to be progressing towards a sense of truer gender equality seen in Austen’s revolutionary novel.

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